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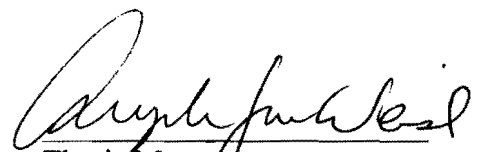
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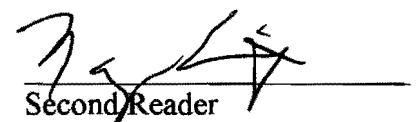
**"I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I Take hede what he wyl ben":
Margery Kempe, Christian Improvement, and the Collapse of Physical Time**

Rachel Tanski

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Second Reader

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“I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I Take hede what he wyl ben”:

Margery Kempe, Christian Improvement, and the Collapse of Physical Time

During an early conversation in Book I of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Jesus Christ tells Margery, “I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I Take hede what he wyl ben” (Kempe 85). This statement proves pivotal to Margery’s lifelong development of faith, as she is finally able to overcome her despair over her past sins and strive toward a spiritual life. What she has done is not important to Christ – what she will be able to do is. Margery therefore learns to endure sexual relations with her husband because her hope for eventual celibacy has already made her blessed in the eyes of God. She can endure life as a middle-class married woman because she intends to break away from its conventions. While Christian belief does traditionally teach that life on earth should prepare one for eternity in heaven, Margery applies this theory in a practical way to earthly life. Her pilgrimages and conversations with religious figures represent a constant journey towards a goal of improvement, whether it be in knowledge or devotion. Her autobiography can then be read as a guide for lay piety, a way for those who have not been called to the Christian ideal of Holy Orders or eternal maidenhood to strive towards a more devout life. Margery’s piety depends not necessarily on improved behavior itself, but on a genuine desire to improve. She is constantly reassured by the hope of future salvation, living in a space unaffected by temporality. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the future becomes a real part of the present, as one’s intentions become the true measure of his or her devotion to God. Throughout the *Book*,

Margery's plans for future piety affect her current state of grace and provide insight into her conception of physical and spiritual time. Margery's consciousness, looking ahead to her salvation and backward to reflect on the lives of Christ, St. Birgitta (Bridget of Sweden), and other influential religious figures, transcends the limits of chronological time in a truly mystical experience.

With only excerpts available until the discovery of the full manuscript in 1934, scholarship on *The Book of Margery Kempe* has been limited until recently. The Introduction to the first translation of the work in 1936 dismissed the text as "painful," warning the reader: "You must come to her not expecting too much, and prepared for anything" (Chambers qtd. in Akel 3). Because the known excerpts created preconceived expectations of a traditional hagiographical work in the minds of some scholars, Kempe's unconventional text, R. W. Chambers cautions, "may disappoint and even shock the reader, unless he is careful to ask from it only those things which it can give him" (Chambers qtd. in Akel 3). Similarly, in 1940, Hope Emily Allen characterizes Margery psychologically as "neurotic, vain, illiterate, physically and nervously overstrained," essentially dismissing the value of the text because of the questionable sanity of its author (qtd. in Windeatt 3). This initial reading of the *Book* set a precedent that devalued the work and limited academic criticism. However, since the 1980s, *The Book of Margery Kempe* has reemerged as an important work of literature, with scholarship and translations increasing greatly. Barry Windeatt's translation in 1985 and Lynn Staley's modernization of the Middle English spelling in her Norton Critical Edition have made the text accessible to a wider range of readers. That Margery's *Book* is now included in the Longman and Norton *Anthologies of British Literature* attests to its value among scholars. The most common critical perspectives on the *Book* focus on "Margery's personhood, her subjectivity, the uses she makes of her body, and

her appropriation by feminist critics” (Renevey and Whitehead 10). Lynn Staley and Karma Lochrie have expanded scholarship on Kempe with more comprehensive analyses of her *Book*. Lynn Staley’s *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions* focuses on the act of translation, with Margery as a translator of gospel and developer of a “common language” for the wider Christian community (Cooper-Rompato 105). She distinguishes between Kempe, the author of the *Book*, and Margery, the subject of the work, a distinction that will hold in this paper. Karma Lochrie’s *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* also focuses on translation as a metaphor for the way Margery relates her visions into a text and challenges popular discourse (Cooper-Rompato 105). Lochrie links Margery’s rhetoric to her flesh, which she distinguishes from the broader context of the body. According to Lochrie, “If woman is identified with the flesh, and specifically, fissured flesh, then the woman writer potentially occupies the site of rupture, where excess and unbridled affections threaten the masculine idea of the integrity of the body” (Lochrie 6). Therefore, “a woman writer such as Kempe brings this fissure into language – into the text... offering a place for access to the sacred” (6). Lochrie goes on to explore this process in terms of Margery’s assertion of her own voice against authority, her laughing and weeping, and her literary legacy. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa furthers this discussion of Margery’s liminality in her essay “Veneration of Virgin Martyrs in Margery Kempe’s Meditation: Influence of the Sarum Liturgy and Hagiography.” Yoshikawa argues that through liturgical ceremonies and venerating a saint, one enters a liminal space in which one can experience a deeper level of spirituality (178). This enables Margery to “establish privileged relationships with saints, relationships in which, taking the role of intimate confidants, they inform Margery about the secret knowledge of God” (Yoshikawa 178). By transcending physical space and time, Margery becomes privy to divine wisdom. Additionally, scholars have shown enough interest in *The Book of Margery*

Kempe to comprise several collections of essays. Yoshikawa's essay appears in the book *Writing Religious Women*, which includes several chapters on Kempe, and has written her own book on Kempe in particular, called *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography*. Other collections include *A Companion to the Book of Margery of Kempe*, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism*, and Lynn Staley's Norton Critical Edition of the *Book*. Very recent readings of the work have yielded unique studies, such as Lisa J. Kiser's article "Margery Kempe and the Animalization of Christ: Animal Cruelty in Late Medieval England" and Colleen Donnelly's "Menopausal Life as Imitation of Art: Margery Kempe and the Lack of Sorority." Such scholarship proves the great amount of possible interpretations of the text. Yet, little has been said about Margery's construction of time and reality, essential themes in her revelations.

As Margery describes, she is very much a part of the physical world before her spiritual conversion. She is tempted by lust, enjoying marital sex with her husband and even recounting an instance of consenting to adultery. She proudly wears expensive, fashionable clothes and boasts about her family's prominence in town. However, after an illness following the birth of her first child, Margery claims to have mystical experiences that lead to her spiritual conversion. At first, Margery struggles to cast off the pleasures of her earthly life in order to achieve spiritual salvation. When she finally does resolve to live piously, Margery worries that her former sin and current status as a married woman will hinder her ability to gain God's grace. In Chapter 21 of Book I, Christ tells Margery that she is pregnant, and she reveals her anxiety over desiring chastity while remaining subject to her husband's sexual cravings, saying "I am the most unworthi creatur that evyr thow schewedyst grace unto in erth" (Kempe 85). Christ explains that Margery's wish alone gives her grace because "I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I Take

hede what he wyl ben” (Kempe 85). While this discussion arises from Margery’s concern over sexual relations with her husband, it reveals a theological doctrine prevalent throughout the *Book*: one’s resolution to become pious is spiritually more important than good deeds themselves. Regarding her specific sin, Christ tells Margery, “trow thow rygth wel that I lofe wyfes also, and specyal tho wyfys which woldyn levyn chast, yyf thei mygtyn have her wyl” (Kempe 84). More generally, Christ tells Margery that her regret over her sins has already caused them to be forgiven, saying “thow hast despysed thiself, therfor thow schalt nevyr be despysed of God” (Kempe 85). In both of these cases, it is Margery’s intent, and not her actions, that define her state of grace. Christ goes on to tell her that the best way to love him is to “have mende of thi wykydnesse and thynk on my goodness” (Kempe 85). Both of these require thought and not action. Christ reinforces the primacy of thought when he says “thow mayst no bettyr plesyn God than contynuly to thinkyn on hys lofe” (Kempe 85). Not only is contemplation pleasing to God, but, according to Christ, it is the *best* way for Margery to gain his grace. The repetition of these thoughts at this pivotal moment of the *Book* emphasizes their centrality to Margery’s spiritual life (and, if the Book is to be considered a guide for others, to that of all Christians).

That Kempe is aware of popular medieval theology is evident in this conversation when Christ tells her, “for, thow the state of maydenhode be mor parfyte and mor holy than the state of wedewhode, and the state of wedewhode mor parfyte than the state of wedlake, yet dowtyr I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world” (Kempe 84-85). The notion that virginity is the most “perfect” state for women, followed by widowhood and then marriage was a common precept of medieval Christian theology (Lipton 132). By the late Middle Ages, this concept had been well-established as doctrine for over a thousand years. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl trace

its development in their Introduction to *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*. Tertullian, a pillar of Christian theology whose teachings have heavily influenced not just the Catholic Church, but Western culture, states, “the most perfect sanctity is that of the virgin, since it has nothing in common with fornication” (qtd. in Carlson and Weisl 1). Other early Church fathers agreed: “Augustine considered chastity to be a gift from God, a grace bestowed on both widows and virgins, while Clement, Jerome, Ambrose, and others also expressed similar sentiments about chastity – that it is a gift not to be taken lightly, sentiments they expressed to both widows and virgins in extended treatises” (Carlson and Weisl 2). This philosophy pervaded medieval Christian culture, and Margery both understands and promotes it. Yet, Christ does tell Margery that he also loves wives and wishes her to continue to be one for some time, with plans of future celibacy. Popular medieval saints, such as “Elizabeth of Hungary, Dorothy of Montau, and Bridget of Sweden made possible the aspiration of devout married woman to mystical marriage, though only if celibacy was adopted” (Fanous 166). These officially venerated women provided real examples of what the Church deemed an acceptable lifestyle for holy women, legitimizing Margery’s claim to holiness as a married woman. Although scholarship on Kempe often focuses on her subversion of religious authority, her philosophy does incorporate orthodox theology with the revelations given to her during her conversations with God. Margery’s emphasis on spiritual, rather than temporal time, then, may reflect a more common medieval Christian notion of self-improvement.

In the pivotal 21st chapter, Christ goes beyond reassuring Margery that she will be blessed despite her status as a sexually active wife, and insists that he actually wishes her to be so for some time before vowing chastity. He wants Margery to bear more children, stating, “for I wyl that thow bryng me forth mor frwte” (Kempe 84). This reveals Margery’s knowledge of

Scripture, in addition to theology, as it echoes the biblical Genesis 1:28: “be fruitful and multiply.” This line appears again (in Latin) in Chapter 51, when, in York, “ther cam a gret clerke onto hir, askyng thes wordys how thei schuld ben undirstondyn, “*Crescite et multiplicamini*” (Kempe 159). Margery’s answer broadens the significance of the phrase past the single issue of child rearing: “thes wordys ben not undirstondyn only of begetyng of chyl dren bodily, but also be purchasyng of vertu, wech is frute gostly, as be heryng of the wordys of God, be good exampyl gevyng, be mekenes and paciens, charité and chastité, and swech other, for pacyens is more worthy than myraclys werkyng” (Kempe 159). Margery thus applies this Scripture to a broader theory of Christian improvement. The words “fruitful” and “multiply” do not only refer to physical, sexual reproduction, but to any kind of “increase,” and in this biblical sense, increase in virtue. *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists one of the definitions of “fruitful” as “productive of good results; beneficial, profitable, remunerative. Now only of actions, qualities, or the like; formerly also of concrete things” (*OED*). The recorded uses of this particular definition date back to 1386 with a line from Chaucer’s “Parson’s Tale,” which proves this meaning would most likely have been commonly understood by Margery and her contemporaries. Similarly, definitions of “multiply” as “to increase or cause to increase in number, quantity, etc.,” without specifying sexual reproduction, date back to the Middle Ages (*OED*). The clerk is satisfied with this reply, saving Margery from charges of heresy and again showing that her philosophy of continuous improvement is compatible with orthodoxy.

While Margery is comforted by the knowledge of her future piety, she is also comforted by Christ’s reassurance of her salvation. She will not only become a woman worthy of God’s grace on earth, but she will actually achieve such grace in heaven. Thus, Margery’s reliance on hope for the future applies beyond her earthly life to her afterlife. Christ first reveals the fate of

Margery's soul early in the *Book*, before Margery has fully converted to a more devout lifestyle.

As she prays in a chapel, "asking mercy and forgyfnes of hir synnes and hir trespass" and

believing that Christ has abandoned her, he tells her

I, the same God, forgefe the thi synnes to the utterest poynt. And thow schalt nevr com in helle ne in purgatorye, but, whan thow schalt passyn owt of this world, wythin the twynkelyng of an eye thow schalt have the blysse of hevyn for I am the same God that have browt thi synnes to thi mend and mad the to be schreve therof. And I grawnt the contrysyon into thi lyves ende. (Kempe 51)

According to Christ, Margery's sins are already forgiven, and her soul will pass straight to heaven upon her death, without spending time in hell or purgatory. This passage is particularly prophetic because it occurs before Margery truly accepts her spiritual conversion, establishing the significance of prophecy and a hopeful future within the first five chapters of the *Book*.

Christ continues to remind Margery of her salvation throughout her life. In the chapter following the conversation during which Christ assures Margery that she will be saved despite being a wife, he must again alleviate her anxiety over her past sins. Margery is again worried about her lack of virginity and believes that she will not experience the joy of heaven because she has not loved God every single day of her life (Kempe 86). Christ responds somewhat impatiently, saying, "A, dowtyr, how oftyntymes have I teld the that thy synnes arn forgove the and that we ben onyd togedyr wythowtyn ende?" (Kempe 86). This of course implies that Margery has received this same reassurance many times, probably more often than is stated in her *Book*, proving its importance to both her and God. Christ also directly addresses her concern over her lack of virginity, stating, "And, forasmech as thu art a mayden in thi sowle, I schal take the be the on hand in hevyn and my modyr be the other hand, and so schalt thu dawnsyn in hevyn wyth other holy maydens and virgyne" (Kempe 88). This echoes Tertullian's statement regarding the fate of widows: "at the first sound of the angel's trumpet they will leap forth lightly, easily able

to endure any distress or persecution, with none of the heaving baggage of marriage in their wombs or at their breasts” (qtd. in Carlson and Weisl 1). Kempe’s word choice suggests that she is aware of the popular image of chaste women expressing special joy in heaven, which further proves that her views correspond with orthodoxy and may articulate a common understanding of Christian improvement. Margery will be worthy of joining the virgins in heaven because, even though she has been a sexually active wife who has borne fourteen children, her vow of chastity, which implies future as well as current behavior, her regret over her former lust, and her desire to improve the state of her soul all contribute to her state of grace. Christ tells Margery that she is a maiden in her soul – her intentions are more important than her actions. Margery’s physically impure state can be spiritually repaired.

The notion that to think is to do is prevalent throughout the *Book*. In Chapter 14, Margery contemplates the different ways that she would like to die for God’s love. She settles on the thought that it would be best to have her head and feet tied to a stake and be beheaded with a sharp axe (Kempe 65). However, Christ tells Margery “I thank the, dowtyr, that thou woldyst for my lofe, for, as oftyn as thou thynkyst so, thou schalt have the same mede in hevyn as thou thu suffredyst the same deth” (65). Because Margery is willing to suffer such a death for God, he considers her to have already done so. Here, again, thought is akin to action, and is perhaps even more important than action because it is what gains her merit.

In addition to her own fate, Margery is also given knowledge of the destination of others’ souls. She gains the power of prophecy through her conversations with Christ. In one instance, Margery is in the presence of a corpse in Church and, without prompting, reveals the fate of the deceased woman and her living husband: “the sowle of this cors is in purgatory, and he that was hir husbond is now in good hele, and yet he schal ben ded in schort tyme” (Kempe 89). Kempe

claims that this prediction proved true and then relates several similar instances. As Margery knows the fate of some people's souls, she is often able to accurately reveal the specific reason for that person's salvation or damnation. In Chapter 12, a monk tests Margery by asking her to tell whether he shall be saved and of what particular sins he is most guilty. Margery converses with God and correctly asserts that the monk has "synned in lethtery, in dyspeyr, and in wordly goodys keypyng," and that he will be saved if he repents and follows Margery's advice (given by God) (Kempe 61). She is even able to tell the monk that he has specifically committed lechery with wives. This power of prophecy makes the future very real to Margery and those who experience her predictions, since knowledge of one's fate allows the future to shape the present. Margery thus acts "as an intermediary between the divine knowledge she receives and the rest of the world," further imitating Christ's role as the living link between God and man (Barr 219). Margery becomes a "translator" of divine knowledge (Barr 219). This gift of prophecy allows Christ to further reassure Margery about her future state of grace by linking the fates of others to their treatment of her. Christ says to Margery, "thei that arn good sowlys schal hyly thank me for the grace and goodnes that I have gove the, and thei that arn wikkyd schal grutchyn and han gret peyn to suffyr the grace that I schewe to the. And therfor I schal chastisyn hem as it wer for myself" (Kempe 198). The knowledge of the fate of others' souls affects Margery in the present. She is both sorrowful for those who will be punished and comforted in her own chosen lifestyle.

Margery is not only given comfort regarding the future state of souls, but also the physical needs of this life and, more specifically, the means to obtain them. Margery gives up her lavish, materialistic lifestyle to live according to Christ's example of poverty, chastity, and limited worldly comfort, a standard advocated and commonly practiced (at least in theory) by

clerics, saints, and other religious figures. Despite her commitment to this way of life, Margery, especially when on pilgrimage, cannot escape the system of the world in which she lives. Practicality compels her to seek the money necessary to cover basic expenses. During moments of uncertainty, when Margery is unsure of how she will find the means to travel, eat, or find shelter, Christ promises to provide for her. In Rome, Margery has given away all her money and worries about how she will survive when Christ says to her

drede the not, dowtyr, for ther is gold to theward, and I have hyte the befortyme
that I wolde nevyr fayl the. And I schal preyn myn owyn modir to beggyn for the,
for thu hast many tymes beggyd for me and for my modir also. And therfor drede
the not. I have frendys in every cuntré and schal make my frendys to comfort the.
(Kempe 129)

This passage is truly prophetic because Christ does not state what he will do for Margery, but what others will do for her. True foresight is not predicting one's own actions, but those of others. While this may not be an impressive ability for a god, telling her so imparts this knowledge to Margery, giving her the foresight of prophecy as well. Because this awareness is given to Margery by God, it is more than simple hope; it is actual intelligence. Margery is truly comforted by this information, and "thankyd hym of this gret comforte, havyng good trost it schuld be as he seyde" (Kempe 129). Margery is thus reassured by her awareness of future events and allows them to affect her psyche in the present. Earthly time collapses in this state of foreknowledge. The predicted events do really come to pass, as immediately after this conversation occurs in the text, Margery meets several people who give her money as gratitude for her company and spiritual guidance. This prophecy is again fulfilled in Chapter 40, when God provides money for Margery to return safely to England (Kempe 134). As similar events continue to occur, Margery becomes so sure of God's assistance that she regularly gives away her wealth to those in need and still manages to find the means to travel on pilgrimage. In

Chapter 44, Margery proposes to go to Santiago, and her companions mockingly ask her where she will get the necessary funds. She replies to them, “Owr Lord God schal helpyn ryth wel, for he fayld me nevyr in no cuntré, and therfor I trust hym ryth wel” (Kempe 143). So quickly that it is almost comical, a man “sodeynly” proves this true by giving Margery forty pence. God’s promise of sustenance has been fulfilled so many times that Margery is certain it will continue. However, this assistance does not come completely unconditionally. In the same Chapter, God reminds Margery, “Dowtyr, stody thow for no good, for I schal ordeyn for the, but evyr stody thow to love me and kepe thi mende on me” (Kempe 143). He will provide for her as long as she remains focused on her spiritual duties. As Carole Slade puts it, “Christ has assured her that he will provide financial as well as spiritual tender, provided that she does not desire money or worldly goods for their own sake. She must not follow the example of those who love Christ because they have received such goods” (120). Thus, the fulfillment of Margery’s current physical needs is dependent on her fulfillment of Christ’s plan for her. Slade further states that Christ “promises goods if she loves him sufficiently, and He requires that she employ those goods to further his goals” (120). Margery’s financial support is therefore linked to behavior, which includes current and future action. God’s promise to provide for Margery’s basic needs informs her concept of time by setting her mind towards future comfort and improvement. His sustenance makes upcoming events real in Margery’s present consciousness.

Christ’s prophetic wisdom is further applied to physical reality by giving Margery insight into her future vindication on earth. Faced with harsh criticism from her peers, public humiliation, and even the threat of execution, it is no surprise that Margery sometimes seeks alleviation of her earthly troubles. Christ assures her that not only will public opinion of her change, but she will actually be honored for her piety. He tells her that in her hometown’s church

people will worship him through her (Kempe 195). This implies that Margery will be venerated, perhaps as a saint, on earth as well as in heaven. Margery's emphasis on future sanctity applies to both the spiritual and physical worlds, a very Christian notion that imitates the divine and human natures of Christ.

Margery's imitation of Christ is further evident in her connection between physical experience and spiritual worth, as Christ often reassures her that the more she suffers on earth, the more loved she will be by God. Margery's primary form of suffering comes from the criticism she endures for her behavior, consisting of her own uncontrollable fits of screaming and weeping, and from others' accusations of hypocrisy over her lifestyle. Christ reassures Margery that "the mor schame, despite, and reprefe that thu sufferyst for my lofe, the bettyr I lofe the," linking the Christian concept of noble suffering to Margery's specific case (Kempe 68). Aware of the merits of suffering, Margery tells a group of men who are chastising her a story in which a man actually pays others to ridicule him (Kempe 63). Margery expresses her own desire for such contempt and thanks the men for it, saying, "I sorwyd for I had no schame, skorne, and despyte as I was worthy. I thank yow alle, serys, heyly what forenoon and aftyrnoon I have had resonably this day, blyssed be God therof" (Kempe 64). As, according to Christian tradition, Christ's crucifixion spiritually redeemed mankind, the physical suffering of men, in imitation, repays their own individual sins. Margery also unites physical with spiritual experience through her sensory knowledge of heaven. In the third chapter of the *Book*, she hears a "swet and delectable" sound as she lies in bed next to her husband that she feels "as sche had ben in paradys" (Kempe 46). Margery is so affected by this noise that she cries out "Alas, that evyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in hevyn," seeming to inherently know that this sound comes from a divine source. It is after this experience that Margery loses all lustful cravings and desires

chastity. Sex becomes so abominable to her that “sche had levar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn the wose, the mukke in the chanel, than to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng” (Kempe 46).

This graphic detail of the troubles Margery would rather endure than have sex with her husband proves that her spiritual thoughts affect her physically. In imitation of Christ’s life, Margery’s physical and spiritual experiences are inseparable. She claims to hear such melodies every day for twenty five years, along with experiencing other physical sensations, such as “swet smellys” and a general feeling of “many gret comfortys, bothe gostly comfortys and bodily comfortys” (Kempe 124). Through these earthly experiences, Margery is able to gain some understanding of the joy of heaven.

Margery imitates Christ by linking her physical world to the divine, and this connection is strengthened by her physical understanding of Christ’s (and his mother Mary’s) suffering, events that occurred over a thousand years before Margery’s lifetime. Her fits of crying are often triggered when contemplating Christ’s passion or Mary’s grief over watching her son suffer. Margery first experiences this crying out when she visits the sight of Christ’s crucifixion in Jerusalem. She “had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn that sche myt not kepe hirself fro krying and roryng thow sche schuld a be ded therfor” (Kempe 104). Later, she is banned from attending the sermons of a certain priest because “sche cryed so whan it plesyd owr Lord to gyfe hir mende and very beholdyng of hys bittyr Passyon” (Kempe 190). Margery is plagued (or blessed) with these sufferings for most of her life, and it is as if she experiences the pain herself. With these “direct, visionary experiences of God and Jesus... the *Book* emphasizes the importance of finding ways to feel secure in God’s love in a manner that is absent from saints’ lives’ descriptions of sanctity” (Krug 132-133). Margery’s visions offer laypeople a way to personally participate in the life of Christ and God’s grace. While not

everyone may be blessed with these divine encounters, they may experience them through her text, further blurring the boundary between the physical and the spiritual. Through these sensations, Margery is connected physically to God and also connected to the past. Her physical reactions create a literal link to events that took place centuries before, further conflating her notion of time. Just as a vow of piety makes the future a real part of the present, such contemplation on Christ's suffering makes the past a part of the present as well.

While these physical reactions to thoughts of Christ blur the distinction between past and present, the two are further conflated by Margery's participation in past events. She envisions herself taking part in the events of Mary's and Christ's lives. This is one of the earliest abilities Margery gains after her spiritual conversion. The first time Margery partakes in a biblical event occurs in Chapter 6 when she attends the birth of the Virgin Mary. Time seems to move quickly, as the "blyssed chyld" becomes old enough to converse with Margery, who eventually joins her and Joseph on a visit to St. Elizabeth (Kempe 53). Next, Margery travels with the couple to Bethlehem and becomes part of the action, acting as a handmaid to Mary and procuring lodgings for her and Joseph. Margery witnesses the birth of Christ and physically handles the child, wrapping him in white clothes. She experiences familiar biblical events, such as the arrival of the three kings, and eventually accompanies the Holy Family to Egypt. At other times in the *Book*, Margery is present at Christ's death, again actively participating with the other biblical figures. In Chapter 79, Margery witnesses an intimate farewell between mother and son before Christ's crucifixion, and speaks with both of them. During the Passion, she and Mary "wept and syhyd ful sor" together, Margery seeing these visions "freschly and as verily as yyf it had ben don in dede in hir bodily syght, and hir thowt that owr Lady and sche wer alwey togedyr to se owr Lordys peynys" (Kempe 230-231). Kempe describes these scenes in vivid detail, as if she

were really there. Margery thus “narrates a vision of Christ... as a corporeal encounter” (Slade 115). While she does admit that these scenes appear to her in moments of deep meditation, her tone when relating them is matter-of-fact and assertive. The physical reality of these experiences seems less important to Margery than their spiritual reality. These past events are real to her in the present time. For Margery, the events important to the Christian religion should always be a part of the current psyche. This is best illustrated when she says in response to a priest who has asked why she weeps so bitterly in response to Christ’s passion, “hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyed this same day, and so me thynkyth it awt to be to yow and to alle Cristen pepil” (Kempe 187). While these visions are unique to Margery and a select group of saints and mystics, she clearly believes that the knowledge imparted by them should be given to and utilized by all Christians. Although they may not be gifted with such realistic meditations, Christians should, according to Margery and common theology, treat the events of Christ’s life as continuously present experiences (Slade 116).

Margery’s active participation in her visions, according to Jessica Barr, complements the passive nature of receiving such thoughts from God (as they are usually involuntary) to combine both reason and intellect, medieval distinctions that Barr calls *ratio* and *intellectus*. Barr explains that “*ratio* involves the use of rational deduction, while the *intellectus* is the faculty that is capable of apprehending truth and that is responsible for granting us knowledge of the ‘first principles’ upon which the deductive efforts of the *ratio* depend” (19). A mystical experience stimulates the *intellectus*, but active participation in the vision requires the *ratio*, or practical reasoning. Margery’s interactions with the biblical figures in her meditations and her communicating the knowledge of her visions to others requires her to exert her own will along with God’s and therefore to experience both the *ratio* and *intellectus* of knowledge. Barr notes

that “not only is she a recipient of divine revelation, but she actually goes out and seeks it... God frequently responds directly to Margery’s prayers and questions and... gives her clear instructions for how to negotiate situations in her life” (223). This classification of two forms of intellect is taken from prominent medieval philosophers. In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas, combining theology with philosophy, argues that “the intellect’s passivity derives from its passing from potency to activity. As the divine acts upon the intellect, the intellect itself becomes active” (Barr 19). However, Aquinas places *intellectus* as superior to *ratio*, as its latent potential to derive knowledge of the divine cannot be achieved through reason (Barr 20). The emphasis that Kempe places on active intellectual interaction with God perhaps coincides better with Franciscan theory, which claims that “although the will relies upon the guidance and illumination of the intellect, it also activates the intellect and is hence the dominant power in determining action” (Barr 21). Thus, in opposition to Aquinas’s assertion, the *ratio* is superior to the *intellectus*. Further,

Franciscans were predominantly voluntarists; they also promoted a form of affective spirituality that included meditation on the events of Christ’s life and vivid techniques of visualization. These practices – with their stress on affective experience and visions as a means of coming into a closer relationship with God – suggest that the Franciscans also believed in personal experience (rather than argumentation) as a means of acquiring knowledge. The Franciscans’ voluntarist approach to divine knowledge can be linked to a growing emphasis upon visionary experience in the later Middle Ages. (Barr 22-23)

Barr then specifically names *The Book of Margery Kempe*, along with a few others, as an example of a work that places emphasis on intellectual action. Although Kempe indicates in her *Book* that she has read, or more likely has listened to readings of, some religious texts, including St. Birgitta of Sweden’s *Revelations*, there is no evidence to suggest that Kempe was aware of these philosophical discussions from a literary or academic perspective. However, the personal philosophy advocated in her *Book* undeniably resembles significant tenets of major schools of

medieval theology, albeit without the sophisticated terminology. That this concept seems reconciled with contemporary theology suggests that Margery was aware of popular Christian thought and integrated it into her text. Through her visions, then, Margery is able to derive knowledge from the past while remaining in the present and expects other Christians to do so.

Margery's active participation in past events through her visions and the foresight divinely imparted to her allow her to transcend the limits of linear earthly time. Another way in which Margery collapses the structure of physical time is through her adherence to philosophical and literary tradition. She is clearly aware of her predecessors, naming them specifically throughout the text. She tells the Vicar of St. Stephen's in Norwich, Richard of Caister, himself author of the popular devotional lyric *Jesu, Lorde, that madest me*, that the grace she experiences during her meditations is greater than that described in "neythyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne *Stimulus Amoris*, ne *Incendium Amoris*, ne non other that evyr sche herd redyn" (Kempe 75). All of these were popular religious works of Margery's time, and her mentioning them shows that she is aware of the tradition of which she is a part. Margery places herself among these by comparing them to her own visions. Margery's literary ambitions are revealed in the next line: "yf sche cowd or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt" (75). She clearly desires to "show" or communicate her feelings of devotion. Margery next names some of the biblical figures and saints with which she communicates, including the virgin Mary, St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Katherine (75). Margery's combined use of literary and religious tradition is evident in the purpose of the text. Her references to other saints, especially those who wrote of their experiences, most significantly St. Birgitta of Sweden, suggests that she intended to follow both their religious and rhetorical examples. Margery's particular reliance of the work of St. Birgitta is evident throughout the *Book*. In addition to naming her among lists of influential saints and

texts, Margery also imitates her lifestyle more closely than any other religious figure. Jacqueline Jenkins explains that Bridget's uniquely active life, both holy woman and married mother, adviser to rulers and church officials, and "pilgrim and mystic" attracted the attention of many medieval women who viewed her as a "very modern saint" (124). Aware of this popularity, since she takes part in it herself, Margery purposely translates her own devotion to St. Birgitta into the text to reinforce "her own saintly self-construction" (Jenkins 124). She draws parallels with the life of St. Birgitta to "provide a context for interpreting the events of" her own life (Jenkins 125). In Chapter 20, Margery is at Mass when she sees the consecrated Eucharist and the chalice of wine flutter above the priest's head. She asks God what this means, and he tells her that it foreshadows an earthquake (Kempe 83). Margery is apparently the only parishioner to witness this phenomenon and Christ explains to her that "My dowtyr, Bryde, say me nevyr in this wyse" (83). Not only does God once again give Margery knowledge of future events, linking them to her present consciousness, but he also bestows more favor on her than he does Birgitta by giving Margery more privileged knowledge. Christ further links Margery to Birgitta when he says, "I telle the forsothe rygth as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to the, dowtyr, and I telle the trewly it is trewe every word that is wretyn in Brides boke, and be the it schal be knowyn for very trewth" (Kempe 83). Again, God privileges Margery's knowledge over Birgitta's because he not only reminds her that he has spoken to both of them, but Margery's knowledge will prove to the world that Birgitta's knowledge is true. Barry Windeatt explains the significance of this exchange succinctly in his footnote to the passage: "God confirms the connection [between Margery and Birgitta] explicitly" (309). Margery includes these parallels because "they are presumably familiar to her readers in a way that Margery may not be, but hopes to be; and the reader, through allusions and parallels with these women in Margery's

narrative, begins to attribute their characteristics (holy, spiritually gifted, chosen by God) to Margery” (Jenkins 125). This is an important literary device because, according to Jenkins, “a large part of the spiritual authority Kempe sought to realize came directly from the associations readers were encouraged to draw from her relationship to the devotional books she names and employs as models in the *Book*” (125). Margery’s view of literary tradition is unique in its performativity. She does not see herself as merely placed among her predecessors, but actively participating with them. This “legitimiz[es] the subject by centering the individual in past experiences that are repeated in the ‘present’” (Akel 11). Margery’s text, in a truly mystical sense, is thus able to transcend the confines of chronological time, as are those among which she places hers.

Margery also symbolically participates in the actual life of her favorite saint and literary mentor, St. Birgitta of Sweden. In Rome, Margery meets the deceased Birgitta’s former maidservant, Catherine of Flanders (Kempe 132). She provides a very real connection to Birgitta as “a woman who was healed by the saint and was treated as a member of the family” (Hopenwasser and Wegener 77). Catherine acts as an intermediary between Birgitta and Margery, creating a tangible link to the past. Therefore, Margery “symbolically travels through time by touching the hand of one who has touched the hand of Mother Birgitta. If one believes that spiritual power can be transferred from one woman to another, this is how and when Birgitta, through her intermediary, passes her gift to Margery” (Hopenwasser and Wegener 77). In this scene, the past again becomes a real part of the present as Margery encounters a physical remnant from Birgitta’s life. Margery’s conflation of past and present in the presence of someone linked to a saint may have been influenced by the medieval devotion to holy relics. The Christian usage of the word relic refers to “the material remains of a saint after his death, as well

as to the sacred objects that have been in contact with his body” (qtd. in Bonser 234). As a “relic” of Birgitta’s, Catherine becomes an object that is able to transcend the limits of chronological time to impart a deeper understanding of faith from St. Birgitta herself. This interaction with Catherine becomes a spiritual experience that gives the past an active role in Margery’s present state.

That Margery places little importance on linear time is evident in the lack of chronology in the text. She mentions events in the beginning of the *Book*, such as her eventual afflictions of crying out and the ability to hear divine melodies, that do not occur until later in the narrative, where they are described in greater detail. Her scribe mentions in the Proem that this is done purposely:

Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn. And therfor sche dede no thing wryten but that sche knew rygth wel for very trewth. (Kempe 36-37).

Kempe is less concerned with chronological order than with revealing the “truth” of her experiences. For Margery, spiritual truth exists beyond the limit of earthly time, making chronology unnecessary for the purpose of her text. This purpose, it must be emphasized, is her spiritual journey, her “inner” life, and not the details of her worldly existence. The *Book* begins with Margery’s spiritual crisis after her first childbirth, ignoring all previous events of her life, including her childhood of which no mention is made, and immediately begins to describe her conversion. Kempe does not mention her children, what one may assume to be an important aspect of a parent’s life, except as they relate to spiritual instruction, such as when Christ tells Margery that she is pregnant, which triggers the conversation about her future chastity previously discussed. The only one of Margery’s children that plays any significant role in the story is a son

whose only purpose in the narrative is to offer another case of a spiritual conversion, more specifically one which Margery helps to initiate. Kempe treats her husband similarly, relegating discussions of him to those that affect her piety, including her struggle to gain his assent to chastity, his loyalty to her in spite of scorn and the times when he briefly abandons her because of it, and his illness before his death, which Margery views as her own punishment for once lusting after the body that now cannot control its bowels (Kempe 221). Because she does not focus on what she deems the trivial details of her earthly life, Kempe does not need to write the Book in chronological order. Many of the episodes she describes are introduced with phrases like "it happened one time that" or "another time," without reference to any specific date or time. Often, events are only placed in relation to similar experiences. What is important to Kempe are the events being described and, even more significant, their spiritual impact which exists outside of the confines of linear time. According to Samuel Fanous, one of the few scholars to address Kempe's conception of time, "the overall effect of this temporal vagueness is to lift the narrative out of its historical context into a world where time is subordinate to action" (161). However, there are a few instances when Kempe does give actual dates, and these "make an increased claim on attention by their very scarcity" (Fanous 161). After the scribe gives the date of the composition of the manuscript, the first date given by Kempe in the narrative is of the day that she is propositioned by a fellow parishioner and agrees to commit adultery. Her temptation occurs "on Seynt Margaretys Evyn befor evynsong," which has a specific date of July 20 (Kempe 49). In a strange turn of events, when Margery acquiesces, the man says that "he ne wold for al the good in this world; he had levar ben hewyn as smal as flesch to the pott" (Kempe 50). Margery is so ashamed and confused by this encounter that she believes God has forsaken her. She laments her sins, desiring to be completely absolved of them, and makes her final and

true commitment to a life of piety. Perhaps this event is dated because of its significance to Margery's spiritual conversion, acting as the impetus that compels her to fully embrace her decision. The third time Kempe gives a specific time and place is at the beginning of Chapter 11 when Margery's husband tries to break their agreement to have a chaste marriage. She bargains with him, agreeing to pay his debts and dine with him on Fridays in exchange for his promise to let her live chastely (Kempe 60). This is another extremely significant event in Margery's spiritual life because her husband's consent to chastity allows her to pursue a life of true piety, one that for medieval mystics required virginity, or as close to it as one could get. Most religious women became spiritual "brides" of Christ, and sexual activity would therefore be considered adultery. Thus, "the acquisition of the chastity agreement is a fundamental prerequisite to Margery's mystical marriage and hence to her deeply desired vocation as the contemplative *sponsa Christi*" (Fanous 165). She must forego her earthly marriage to achieve a more important and lasting spiritual marriage. According to Margery, then, "temporality is a human concern and is therefore replaced by a sense of divine timing that is not linear but typological, emphasizing the symbolic nature of the life... the saint's life stands outside time and place, in an ideal, abstract setting of the virtues" (Fanous 169-170). Another specific place and time given in the *Book* occurs at the beginning of Chapter 5, "on a Fryday befor Crystmes Day, as this creatur, knelyng in a chapel of Seynt John wythinne a cherch of Seynt Margrete in N, wept wondir sore" (51). Christ speaks directly to Margery after her temptation by adultery and

offers a very practical kind of summary lay Rule which covers rubrics for prayer, eucharistic reception, spiritual supervision, diet, and dress. He ordains the nature of her vocation, assigning her contemplative exercises; he foretells her trials and celestial rewards. He promises lifelong contrition; foreshadows her mystical marriage; calls himself by the name she inscribes in her wedding ring; promises her sufficient grace to answer all clerks; and, last but by no means least, invokes the first reference to a repeated promise of universal fame. (Fanous 168)

While such conversations with Christ occur throughout the Book, this one is especially significant because “the contents of this speech form a touchstone throughout Margery’s life and are subsequently recalled, invoked, applied, and modified repeatedly” (Fanous 168). This discussion, then, acts as the guide by which Margery lives her life and the text is written. Margery’s conception of chronological time may be described as having a dual significance. It both marks the most important experiences of her spiritual journey and renders earthly events ultimately unimportant compared to their spiritual significance. The lack of chronology in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is not just the result of an old woman recalling memories twenty years afterward, but an important literary device.

The lack of importance Margery places on earthly time is reinforced by what Christ tells her at the beginning of Chapter 64: “Dowtyr, thu knowist not how meche I lofe the, for it may not be knowyn in this werld how meche it is, ne be felt as it is, for thu schuldist faylyn and brestyn and nevyr enduryn it for the joye that thu schuldist fele” (196). He explains that his love is too strong to be fully experienced in the physical world, as its strength would be harmful. Margery must therefore wait until her soul reaches heaven to gain such knowledge. This emphasis on future wisdom renders the present less significant. The two, present and future (and even past), are combined as God’s promise to Margery of future wisdom becomes part of her present consciousness. This is particularly evident when Kempe writes in Chapter 3, “Than was sche glad in hir consciens whan sche belevyd that sche was entryng the wey which wold leden hir to the place that sche most desired” (47). Margery believes that she is on the correct path to spiritual redemption. This situation places Margery’s consciousness in both the present and the future because she is comforted by the upcoming salvation that her current actions will cause.

Margery's knowledge of coming events, regarding both her soul and her time on earth, continues to reassure her current state of mind.

This divinely imparted knowledge becomes active in the present as it saves Margery numerous times from public humiliation, persecution, and even the threat of execution. Because of her public devotion, Margery is often accused of being a Lollard, a member of a group of outspoken critics of Church orthodoxy, many of which were burned for heresy (Arnold 90). As a result, she often finds herself having to prove the orthodoxy of her thought in front of important Church officials. When Margery is brought before the Archbishop of York, she prays to God for both wisdom and strength (Kempe 162). Although in some instances, Margery is able to answer questions of orthodoxy without divine help, as she seems to do when responding to the "be fruitful and multiply" question, she uses divine grace to discuss the Articles of Faith (163). Margery claims that God "gaf hir grace to answeyn wel and trewly and redily wythowtyn any gret stody so that he myht not blamyn hir" (163). Margery is therefore able to answer the Archbishop without great effort or "stody" on her part. God seems to act through Margery in this chapter, as he imparts unsolicited knowledge to her. (In her previous prayer, she simply asks for strength in answering the Archbishop's questions, not necessarily for God to intercede personally). Margery answers the questions well, so that "he might not blame her," or so that the Archbishop may not accuse her of heresy. However, this phrase may have a double meaning. It may perhaps emphasize the transcendental quality of this divine knowledge, since Margery's word choice also implies that she is removed of blame for these answers; they are not really hers. With God acting through her, Margery thus transcends the boundary between physical and spiritual space and consequently the limits of linear time. Her knowledge of the divine tangibly affects her present condition, and this revelation may be Kempe's true purpose in relating her

trials. John. H. Arnold points out that in this episode “there is no theological debate... the performance of the orthodox articles of faith is left shrouded, and the nature of some charges against her remain unclear” (87). This is true for nearly all of Margery’s accounts of her clashes with church authority. The most detailed encounter is the previously mentioned brief exchange on the meaning of the phrase “be fruitful and multiply,” but Margery’s answer that it also relates to ever increasing piety makes this discussion relevant to her conception of futurity. Kempe’s purpose in including these experiences in her narrative, then, is not to give details of her worldly life or to engage in theological debate, but to illustrate further the influence of the divine in her physical world.

Margery’s own foresight, apart from her spiritual revelations, also affects her present actions. Margery expects her *Book* will be used as a guide to piety by fellow Christians. Therefore, as she dictates the text, she is aware of its prospective spiritual value. Margery implies several times throughout the work that she intends to be an example for others. In Chapter 48, when Margery must answer to critical religious officials in Leicester, she prays to God “that sche myth han grace, wytte, and wysdam so to answeyn that day as myth ben most plesawns and worschep to hym, most profyth to hir sowle, and best exampyl to the pepyl” (Kempe 152). In this possibly fatal situation, Margery thinks not only of herself, but of the use her experience can be to others, specifically using the word “example.” Its place within a series of phrases describing what Margery wishes to gain in her explanation to the officials makes Margery’s example as significant as what is most “pleasing” to God and “most profitable to her soul,” what Margery values most. In the Proem, Margery’s scribe also suggests the text’s usefulness as a guidebook in the opening line: “Here begynnyth a schort tretys and a comfortabyl for synful wrecchys, wherein thei may have gret solas and comfort to hem and undyrstondyn the

hy and unspecabyll mercy of ower sovereyn Savyowr Cryst Jhesu” (Kempe 33). By reading the text, the common sinner can be “comforted” and gain an “understanding” of God’s grace. This adds validity to Margery’s visions and meditations and implies that others can learn by them.

The scribe goes on to say of Christ, “that now in ower days to us unworthy deyneth to exercysen hys nobeley and hys goodnesse” (33). The use of the word “unworthy” emphasizes humanity’s need for such instruction, further legitimizing Margery’s work. In the Proem, readers are thus immediately presented with the author’s instructions on how to read the work. This foresight regarding readership probably affects Margery’s consciousness as she dictates, further conflating present and future time.

Margery’s emphasis on futurity resembles the focus on prospective profit associated with business ventures. She is continuously concerned with increasing her spiritual worth. Thus, Margery’s awareness of future results may be an outcome of her upbringing in a mercantile society. Rebecca Krug notes that texts of saints’ lives “often represent their subjects as part of an elite social class, and although personal financial considerations rarely contribute overtly to the saints’ spiritual decisions, high social standing contributes to the contexts of these spiritual decisions” (135). While she was not a member of the nobility as were St. Agnes, St. Birgitta, and St. Christina, Margery did possess the “financial freedom” to pursue “her spiritual path” with relative ease (Krug 136). Kempe sets her *Book* apart from other hagiographical texts by choosing to include her financial considerations. Her socioeconomic status, as those of the saints with which she was familiar, does not compel her to do so; this is a purposeful literary tactic. Margery’s discussions of economic exchange regarding her pilgrimages and spiritual guidance alert “readers to the economic demands that the pursuit of a sanctified life places on believers. In contrast to traditional saints’ lives, the *Book* includes observations about financial arrangements

that affected believers and the religious institutions to which they belonged” (Krug 136).

Margery’s unconventional attention to medieval material culture offers a glimpse into the reality of the monetary cost of piety and reveals her own perspective on the relationship between spirituality and profit. A businesswoman herself, many of Margery’s interactions in her *Book*, including spiritual ones, reflect her understanding of interaction as an exchange of values. That Margery’s understanding of her spiritual worth was influenced by her mercantile background is also evident in her language. In Chapter 12, when she encounters the monk whose sin of lechery with wives she is able to discern, Margery notices that he initially “set hir at nowt,” a line which most modern translations agree means “set no value on her at all” (Kempe 61). This language is reinforced by action as her spiritual guidance is often exchanged for money or for “services for which she might have had to pay” (Slade 119). This same monk, after Margery reveals his spiritual fate, “toke hir be the hand and led hir into a fayr hows of offyce, made hir a gret dyner, and sythen gaf hyr gold to prey for hym” (Kempe 62). She receives both cash (gold) and necessities (dinner and lodgings) in exchange for her foresight. This occurs throughout the *Book*, as those who value Margery’s guidance compensate her for it. Since Margery’s desire to suffer for God implies that she does not embark on this spiritual journey for such worldly profit, she must have some other intention for specifically including these exchanges in the text. Such compensation does not reflect the value that Margery places on her own visions, but the value others place on them. Offering Margery money and goods in exchange for her revelations signifies their inherent worth to those who give. Margery relates these encounters in her text to show the importance of her work to others and to reinforce its purpose as a spiritual guide. These exchanges, especially those that involve revelation or foresight on Margery’s part, reinforce the “value” of one’s spiritual fate to present consciousness. Many feel comforted by

Margery's knowledge of their states of grace, linking future consciousness to present consciousness. Understanding these spiritual exchanges according to mercantile practices emphasizes the importance of futurity for Margery's state of grace.

While Margery's understanding of timelessness is evident in her discussions with Christ and her interactions with others, she does state it more explicitly in her *Book*. Towards the end of Book I, in Chapter 72, Margery gives a more specific account of her concept of time: "So be processe of tyme hir mende and hir thowt was so joynyd to God that sche nevyr forgate hym but contynually had mende of hym and behelde hym in alle creaturys" (Kempe 212). Here, Margery refers to time as a "process," as something ongoing. While chronological time, as it moves linearly forward, may be considered a process, the rest of Margery's comment shows that her view is more complex. Again, her word choice is important. Margery's thought is not "on" or "reflecting on" God, but "joined" to God. Being linked to God elevates Margery's consciousness to a divine space unconstrained by the limitations of physical time. Margery is joined to an omnipotent, ever-existing being. She continually has him on her mind and beholds him in all creatures, emphasizing the unity of her consciousness with God's. In this passage, Margery conveniently and clearly explains to readers the concept of time and space that she has been illustrating throughout her *Book*.

The Prayer with which Margery ends offers a final insight into her perception of time. Although Margery does not discuss time directly, her request for God's mercy for all people who do exist, have existed, and will exist reflects the transcendent abilities of her consciousness. Margery lists specific groups of people ("alle Cristen kyngys... . alle lordys and ladiis that arn in this world... Jewys... Sarazinys... alle fals titharys, thevys, vowtererys and alle comown women, and for alle myschevows levarys... for al the pepil in this world"), but in doing so

covers all categories of human existence (Kempe 292-297). Lynn Staley describes the communal quality of this final address: "The prayer itself is intercessory, so Margery offers it, as well as the grace she herself has known, for any and all" (xix). Staley recognizes an important aspect of the prayer: Margery wishes to extend her own grace onto others. This spiritual exchange in the physical world is the final culmination of Margery's belief in the physical manifestation of the spiritual and the timelessness of her consciousness (since this would presumably apply to *all* people, not solely those living in the present). This prayer applies to all people, and therefore to Kempe's readers as well. When used as a way to read the text, this exchange of grace implies that Margery "expects her readers to transcend the written word and follow her example in order to move on to a richer spiritual experience and fulfillment" (Akel 6). Staley also notes that Margery says her prayer while kneeling before the Eucharist at church (xix). This is an appropriate image to set in the reader's mind during the prayer because the transubstantial host represents the most tangible form of the combination of the ordinary and divine on earth, as well as the collapse of chronological time because what is believed to be an actual part of Christ's body transcends the distance of the past to exist in the present.

When Christ tells Margery Kempe early in her *Book* that he is more concerned with what a person will become rather than what he or she does at the present moment, he articulates a notion of personal improvement that informs the complex philosophy Margery expresses throughout the *Book*. This emphasis on futurity pervades Margery's conflation of the physical and spiritual and her notion of a timeless consciousness. The visions that seem so real to her that she often participates in them allow her to transcend the limits of physical space and linear time. Hence, "throughout the *Book* there is a vividly spatial sense of the soul as a capacious space into which Christ, Mary, and some saints may be welcomed for conversation" (Windeatt 8). The

foreknowledge of earthly events and of the fates of souls given to her by Christ similarly conflates her present and future consciousness. Margery's awareness of her own place among literary and religious tradition also places her thoughts in the past, present, and future simultaneously. While Margery's illustration of this philosophy is as unique as the form of her text, her displayed knowledge of common medieval philosophy, evident in her textual references and her ability to satisfactorily answer the theological tests of church officials, implies that this may be a pervasive precept of Christianity, but formerly unarticulated. At the very least, it is compatible with accepted doctrine. As Barry Windeatt aptly states, Margery's view of physicality and time translates into the way she writes (or dictates) her text: "To be in conversation with otherworldly interlocutors... evidently becomes part of Kempe's consciousness and hence part of the texture of her *Book*" (8). In this way, *The Book of Margery Kempe* genuinely becomes the work of a medieval mystic.

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